We would start from a railroad station at the mouth of a valley after shipping our luggage to another station in another valley. We carried only essentials, about fifteen to twenty pounds each, in knapsacks, and went from shelter to shelter, often crossing and recrossing the range, spending each night on another pass or peak. Then we descended to the station where our luggage was waiting. Usually we made three or four such excursions each summer. We learned the basic rules of mountaineering: to keep an even pace, neither too fast nor too slow; to watch the trail; to stop for rest at the proper time and at a convenient place. After five or six years of mountaineering, we were no longer amateurs. We ascended many lofty peaks of the Tyrol and could handle without a guide any route accessible to experienced climbers.

In all our trips in the Tyrol, the Bavarian Alps, the Pyrenees, Norway, and Switzerland, we had only one accident—on the Gross Glockner, one of the most popular peaks in Austria. The ascent of this mountain is not difficult and takes four or four and a half hours from the Alpine hostel at the foot of the mountain to a shelter close to the summit, the Eagle's Nest. We spent the night in the lower hostel and discovered, about four o'clock in the morning, that all the guided parties had left shortly after midnight. Only two hospital nurses and two railroad employees, all of them from Vienna, were still in the hostel. We decided to go up together. We traveled light, with almost empty knapsacks, leaving most of our equipment in the valley—woolen socks and mittens, sweaters, shawls, and the medicine kit with the obligatory little bottle of rum. We thought we would not need these things for a one-day hike, since it should not take more than eight hours to get to the summit and back.

From the terrace in front of the hostel I could see our path clearly through field glasses—a steep rocky trail, a level stretch across the glacier, then a climb up the face of an almost vertical rock. The guidebook said that the last section of the trail was secured by a steel cable.

The first part of the route proved easy, and the passage across the glacier was delightful. We walked as on a bridge of ice. As we were approaching the rock wall on the far side of the glacier, the weather suddenly changed. Black clouds appeared in the sky, and the air became heavy and motionless. Something strange was going on, and we began to run toward the rock wall. The moment we reached it, a blizzard broke. In the whirling snow one could not see one's own hands. The howl of the wind was deafening. The temperature fell below freezing, perhaps below zero.

All six of us stood pressed against the rock. We tried to give the Alpine signals of distress, but they were lost in the wind. We huddled together and considered waiting until the storm subsided. It was